

Teachers' Insights
**Critical Elements in Parental Involvement of Culturally
and Linguistically Diverse Parents**

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Abstract

It was my privilege to serve as the editor for the publication of a collection of University of Houston-Clear Lake masters' research studies in the area of culturally and linguistically diverse parental involvement entitled *Critical Issues in Parental Involvement*. I share with you my observations and conclusions drawn from this enlightening and rewarding experience.

Introduction

The involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse parents is critical to the unique educational needs of their children. The teachers and administrators of the 1990's can, through commitment and collaboration, utilize to its maximum this potentially powerful tool to augment current educational programs.

To properly ensure effective involvement, teachers and administrators must first assess the needs of its culturally and linguistically diverse student/parent population, the specific talents and training of its teaching staff, the present resources of the school, and the potential resources from the community. Teachers, administrators and community leaders should then proceed collectively, as a team, to tailor plans, to provide opportunities for parental involvement, that meet the specific needs of its target population.

Effective communication

Effective communication must begin on first contact with these parents. Teachers and support staff should be available, in place, and prepared to deal with the first appearance of linguistically diverse parents. Communication should then continue, if necessary,

in the native language of the parents by teachers, aides, and administrators. When needed, translators should be readily available. Continuous communication should then be initiated and sustained via telephone calls, personal invitations, written notes newsletters, and even videos as most parents prefer personal communication. Advance planning and staff collaboration of talents can facilitate effective communication.

Comfort Level

The comfort level of culturally and linguistically diverse parents should be of prime consideration. They should be made to be physically and mentally comfortable and welcome in the schools of their children. Special efforts should be initiated to make these parents feel their importance. By encountering a friendly and supportive staff, these parents must be encouraged to express their needs, desires, and concerns. Their contributions and efforts should be publicly acknowledged and rewarded. Sensitivity and respect for their culture should be exhibited by the staff in their children's schools.

Barriers

Barriers that exist between these parents and schools must be identified by the schools' staff and addressed to be resolved. These can be identified through team efforts in the forms of surveys, personal contact, and professional assistance. Special inservice training can ensure the proper staff awareness of this critical area.

It is imperative that these parents be brought physically into their children's schools through planned activities and invitations provided by teachers, para-professionals, other parents, and administrators. Planned activities for these parents should include provisions for a flexible time schedule that provides for non-interference with parents' work schedules, transportation, child-care, and translators. Involvement and contributions from the community in services and materials should be sought after and encouraged.

Parental Literacy

Addressing the literacy of both the parents and children is necessary to build the overall family structure as a positive source of support for schools. English as a Second Language should be provided by the schools or the community. Instruction in functional

or survival skills, parenting skills, and possible job skills can be made available through school and/or community efforts.

Education and orientation of culturally and linguistically diverse parents is necessary and should include an understandable presentation that explains the school's goals, expectations and opportunities available to their children. Collaborative efforts between staff and community and/or customized videos in the various native languages can facilitate this task.

Introduction and guidance of culturally and linguistically diverse parents into involvement that lead to *decision-making* and *governance* should be the ultimate goal of schools. This can be accomplished through collaborative efforts of administrators, teachers, parents, and communities to ensure opportunities and make provisions for the specific needs of these parents.

Continuous and sustained assessment, collaboration, evaluation, and team effort can make parental involvement a reality for culturally and linguistically diverse parents that can positively augment current educational programs. When cultivated with awareness, sensitivity, and commitment, their involvement can become a powerful catalyst for positive educational improvement of their children's educational potential.

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